

Book reviews

ABC of sexually transmitted diseases. By Michael W Adler, 1984. British Medical Journal, London. Pp 54 and index. Price £4 inland, £6 or US\$10.50 overseas.

With this compilation of articles, which were originally published in the British Medical Journal, Professor Adler has provided a clear, concise, and up to date handbook on sexually transmitted disease. In 54 pages he covers the entire range of the subject, from epidemiology, through diagnosis and management, to prevention and control. This is not a book for the specialist, but it does give the interested non-specialist practical advice and an idea of what genitourinary medicine in the 1980s is all about.

The format, with its large page size, is stylish and effective, though occasional references to "last week's article" betray its origins. The diagrams, photographs, and tables that accompany and summarise the text have been designed with the busy reader in mind and provide essential information at a glance.

The introductory chapter on the changing and growing problem presented by the sexually transmitted — and transmissible — diseases is an effective scene setter, marred only by a reference in the text to the increasing incidence of gonorrhoea, accompanied by a graph showing its steady decline in the United Kingdom since the late 1970s.

For the rest of his book Professor Adler has adopted a refreshingly problem orientated approach, dealing with the patient rather than the disease, and emphasising the psychological impact on the patient of a diagnosis to which considerable stigma is still attached. The traditional chapters on gonorrhoea and chlamydial, and non-specific genital infection are replaced by chapters on gonorrhoea and chlamydial and management of urethral and vaginal discharge. The non-specialist is given an idea of what he can be expected to deal with himself, and when he should refer patients for specialist advice. A similar approach is applied to genital ulceration, the complications of genital infections, genital infestations, and the other conditions that may present in the genital area. Helpful chapters on sexually transmitted diseases as they may affect the pregnant woman, fetus, and neonate, and on psychosexual problems are included.

Sexually transmitted viral diseases have become increasingly important, and separate chapters are devoted to warts, herpes, viral hepatitis, and the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). These are subjects that currently excite considerable research activity, and textbooks can be out of date by the time of publication. Much more is known about the link between genital wart virus infection and cancer of the cervix, and the article on AIDS was obviously published before the identification of HTLV-III. Perhaps a second edition will be available soon!

Syphilis is the last of the sexually transmitted diseases to be described — which may be appropriate in the 1980s — but it is described well, and with emphasis on specialist referral. The problem for many general practitioners these days may be thinking of the possibility of syphilis in the first place.

A book as short as this is necessarily dogmatic; many specialists will disagree with Professor Adler about details of his recommendations for treatment and follow up. This reflects differences in clinical practice, which themselves reflect the needs of different populations, and does not diminish the value of the advice given.

This must be one of the most visually attractive paperbacks on sexually transmitted diseases to have been published for some time. It is an excellent basic book for the non-specialist, the medical student, and for nursing and paramedical staff associated with genitourinary medicine.

J M Sommerville

Sexually transmitted diseases. A clinical syndrome approach (Reproductive Medicine Series, Volume 7). Edited by Vincent A Spagna and Richard B Prior, 1985. Marcel Dekker, New York. Pp 498 bound, illustrated. Price \$85.00 (USA and Canada); £99.15 (UK).

This book is one of a series on "Reproductive Medicine" that, according to the introduction, "would span the Atlantic Ocean" and "have an author or editor in Europe and one in the United States". With this in mind it is curious that the two joint editors are from Columbus, Ohio, and that 20 of the 23 contributors are also from Ohio,

the remaining three being based in other parts of the United States of America. The text is therefore almost entirely directed to practitioners working in the USA with particular reference to the epidemiology and management of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Bold statements such as "all newborn receive either topical or parenteral therapy to prevent gonococcal ophthalmia neonatorum" are made without qualification. Occasional commendable exceptions appear when, for example, the practice of routinely giving epidemiological treatment to sexual contacts of patients with gonorrhoea is critically examined.

The text is largely divided into chapters describing clinical syndromes to help "private practitioners who encounter STD's in their daily practices". Chapters on condylomata acuminata and a combined one on ectoparasites and molluscum contagiosum detract from the coherence of this clinical syndrome approach. It is therefore clear that this book will be of most value to those occasionally encountering these clinical problems. The specialist will be disappointed that several important topics are neglected, as exemplified by the clinical manifestations of syphilis, detailed in only two pages and with no information on late syphilis. Illustrations throughout are limited and, in a subject where the visual appearance of the disease is important, five pages containing 14 small colour pictures seem unsatisfactory.

As each chapter is written by different contributors there is much unnecessary repetition. The growth cycle of chlamydia, for example, is described in three separate chapters. Tighter editorial control would have helped. When read individually, however, some chapters, are excellent and generously supported by contemporary worldwide references. I would pick out the chapters on urethritis, cervicitis, the "gay bowel" syndrome, and especially pelvic inflammatory disease as being of the highest order.

The final deciding factor before advising an individual or a medical librarian to acquire a book must be the price. At £99.15 this volume is grossly overpriced and, as there are many excellent alternatives available at a fraction of the price, I cannot justify or recommend its purchase.

R S Pattman